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SUBJECT: Qatar Sharpening Focus on Food Security and Related Technologies; Amir Increasingly Involved; Domestic and Regional Food Security Policies Under Development

Introductory Note

¶1. (SBU) The text below summarizes a new GOQ policy paper on Qatar's food security policies and strategies. The paper was given to Ambassador LeBaron by an officer of Qatar's National Food Security Program, with the understanding that it would be circulated within the U.S. Executive Branch.

¶2. (SBU) In Embassy Doha's judgment, Qatar's food security policies and strategies reflect the rapidly growing intent by the Amir and Crown Prince to make food security a key national priority for Qatar, not just in terms of Qatar's own food security needs, but in terms of the food security needs of the Arab region. 3. (SBU) That judgment stems from our conversations with Qatar government officials and from this part of the policy paper:

-- While QNFSP's short-term focus is on the State of Qatar and building the domestic agricultural sector to diminish reliance on imports, the strategic goal of QNFSP is to export the technologies developed in Qatar to countries throughout the MENA region, and other areas with arid climates.

-- Toward that end, some research results will be part of the public domain and available to everyone. Some technology transfer to poorer MENA nations will be donor-based, through the activities of the offices of the State Minister for International Cooperation. The third component of Qatar's strategic goal of exporting QNFSP technology will be more commercially based, and will employ public/private partnerships.

End Introductory Note.

Qatar's Food Security Policy: Components

¶4. (SBU) The food security policy of the State of Qatar is comprised of several related components that the GOQ is integrating into a unified, overarching policy. These policy components include:

-- The Qatar National Food Security Program (QNFSP), its food security principles, approaches, and strategies;
-- Qatar's trade policy and relationships;
-- Qatar's donor relationships with multilateral organizations and NGOs;
-- Food security research and education; and
-- Commercial investment abroad with a food-security element.

¶5. (SBU) Below is a discussion of each component, with emphasis on the role each plays in the integrated and unified approach to food security that Qatar is developing.

QNFSP: Its Principles and Composition

¶6. (SBU) QNFSP is rapidly emerging as Qatar's principal national task force for food security policy development. The chairman of QNFSP heads an interagency task force that researches and develops food security policy. It is comprised of 14 government ministries and independent agencies, and research partners. QNFSP was initiated by a Decree from the Heir Apparent in November 2008.

¶7. (SBU) A fundamental defining principle that characterizes the QNFSP policy recommendations is maximum participation in all aspects of the agricultural sector by the private sector. The government role is intended to be similar to that in market economies with developed agricultural sectors. That is, the government will provide research, extension, and infrastructure, and will operate a market-based stabilization structure.

¶8. (SBU) Government entities may provide investment incentives and facilitate financing. But their primary role is to create a dynamic investment environment for the private sector. The government will not invest in, own, or operate agribusinesses. The primary emphasis will be on private investment in the agri-sector on a profit-making basis.

¶9. (SBU) This emphasis on a commercially-driven Qatari agricultural sector is reflected in the composition of the QNFSP Task Force. Besides the various government entities, three members of the Task Force are commercial food-related companies. These are Hassad Foods, Mawashi, and Al-Meera. Their presence is intended to foster a robust, commercially-based agricultural sector in Qatar.

QNFSP: Goals both Domestic and International

¶10. (SBU) Accordingly, QNFSP's primary focus is on the domestic agricultural sector, and on developing a complete framework for the efficient functioning of domestic agriculture. But domestic production is not the only element of the unified food security policy Qatar is developing. The unified policy Qatar is developing will require that domestic production be complemented by external development, according to QNFSP.

¶11. (SBU) While QNFSP's short-term focus is on the State of Qatar and building the domestic agricultural sector to diminish reliance on imports, the strategic goal of QNFSP is to export the technologies developed in Qatar to countries throughout the MENA region, and other areas with arid climates.

¶12. (SBU) Toward that end, some research results will be part of the public domain and available to everyone. Some technology transfer to poorer MENA nations will be donor-based, through the activities of the offices of the State Minister for International Cooperation. The third component of Qatar's strategic goal of exporting QNFSP technology will be more commercially based, and will employ public/private partnerships.

International Financial Corporation Approach a Model

¶13. (SBU) Qatar has given Embassy Doha an example of how the latter might be structured. Although only in the development stage, the technology model being considered by Qatar is similar to the business model of the International Finance Corporation (IFC). Indeed the IFC would most likely play a pivotal role in the export of technology. QNFSP has already had what it describes as "very positive" discussions with the IFC.

¶14. (SBU) Using solar/desalination as an example a possible format for technology export to poorer MENA countries would be as follows: a Qatari consortium, possibly involving QNFSP's research partners, would joint-venture with the IFC, and a company in the target MENA country. Initial grant money could be provided by the Global Environmental Fund, or some other multilateral. Then the joint venture would finance the remainder of investment costs. Under the IFC model, the investment would be subject to due-diligence, and would have to show a positive profit, but would also have to contain a social-benefit (in this case providing sustainable water to enhance domestic production for food security).

¶15. (SBU) Although designed on a commercial basis, the economics of the technology export would have to be feasible to the target country. This would be a primary principle of any technology-export model and for that reason Qatar fully expects any private/public partnership to include members of the international multilateral community involved with aid and finance facilitation, as well as developed countries.

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Food Security to be Priority Trade Policy Issue
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¶16. (SBU) Qatar recently strengthened its emphasis on trade policy in a food-security context, an indication that Qatar's approach to food security is, increasingly, not limited to domestic production, nor Qatari-centric. HE Khaled bin Mohammed Al-Attiya, State Minister for International Cooperation and Acting Minister of Business and Trade, indicated Qatar's global view during his address at the November WTO Ministerial in Geneva. He stressed that transparency and the elimination of trade barriers was especially important for those countries reliant on international trade for food security. The relationship between trade rules and modalities, and food-security, is a priority item on Qatar's trade policy agenda, accordingly to QNFSP.

Qatar's Global Donor and Charity Operations

¶17. (SBU) [QNFSP has promised to provide a complete list of Qatar's globally-oriented food-security donor activity.]

Research and Education

¶18. (SBU) Qatar has committed to establish a regional hub of education and research institutions that will serve the entire Arab world in the area of food security.

¶19. (SBU) Qatar's intention is to have a critical mass of research organizations and educational institutions physically located in Qatar to serve as a regional repository of research on all critical elements of food security in the Arab region.

¶20. (SBU) To this end, on top of the institutions already located in Qatar, serious negotiations are ongoing with DLR (the dominant repository of research information on solar energy) to locate an adjunct dedicated to the specific challenges of solar power in the MENA region in Doha.

¶21. (SBU) Similar negotiations are proceeding with the Norman Borlaug Institute for International Agriculture, affiliated with Texas A&M University. In fact, Texas A&M is planning on adding to its Qatari engineering school by bringing components of its agricultural college to Education City in Doha.

Policy Toward Agricultural Investments Abroad

¶22. (SBU) There has been much controversy regarding Gulf nations

purchasing land in places like Sudan for the purpose of producing agricultural products for the home market, in order to mitigate food-security risk.

¶23. (SBU) Qatar is developing an approach that is intended to be sustainable, especially through the models being developed by Hassad Foods in collaboration, as one example, with development experts at Qatar Charity.

¶24. (SBU) First, Hassad has innovated by considering investments in overseas agribusinesses rather than only purchasing land in countries with questionable property rights, and where the indigenous population may not benefit from such purchases. Second, where land is being purchased, Hassad is consulting with development experts at organizations such as Qatar Charity in order to develop sustainable investment models where the local population benefits from technology transfer, enhanced markets and infrastructure, and remunerative selling arrangements.

¶25. (SBU) This is very much a work in progress, but Qatar's projects in this area are attempting to follow many of the recommendations of researchers at multilateral organizations that are addressing problems with overseas land investments.

LeBaron